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DE RUEHYE #0846/01 2941603
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FM AMEMBASSY YEREVAN
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8172
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000846

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/19/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [AM](#)
SUBJECT: TER-PETROSSIAN SUSPENDS PUBLIC RALLIES, WITH SOME
NASTY SWIPES AT U.S. POLICY

REF: YEREVAN 840

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Classified By: AMB Marie L. Yovanovitch, reasons 1.4 (b/d).

SUMMARY

[11](#). (C) At his latest protest rally October 17, ex-President Levon Ter-Petrossian (LTP) sharply criticized President Sargsian, and also took some broad swipes at the U.S. and the West. The move seemed calculated to bolster his credibility with his base, as he announced the end of active protests. Stating he did not want his campaign to result in undue Armenian concessions in resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict or rapprochement with Turkey, Ter-Petrossian accused the U.S. of conniving with Sargsian to shore up the latter's domestic legitimacy in exchange for Armenian concessions on the NK conflict and normalizing relations with Turkey. He also accused the U.S. of pressuring President Sargsian to replace Russia with Turkey as an NK mediator, and of trying to drive Russia from the South Caucasus altogether. END SUMMARY.

TEMPORARY HALT OF PROTESTS ANNOUNCED

[12](#). (C) At a rare, authorized rally held by ex-President Levon Ter-Petrossian and perhaps 15-20,000 of his supporters in downtown Yerevan, LTP blasted the West -- "represented by the USA and its ally Turkey" -- for "turning a blind eye" to Armenia's recent democratic setbacks in exchange for Armenia's President Serzh Sargsian softening Armenia's positions on the resolution of the Karabakh conflict and rapprochement with Turkey. LTP explained his move to temporarily halt his campaign by citing a pledge he made earlier this year where he said he would ask his supporters to suspend their opposition movement in the event of a military threat against Armenian-controlled Nagorno-Karabakh. According to LTP, Armenia has "never been as vulnerable to external pressure in its 17 years of independence as it is today," and were he to continue his protest actions, it would weaken Sargsian's negotiating positions and make Sargsian and Armenia more vulnerable to Western pressure to exploit the situation. (NOTE: Reftel detailed a visit to the Embassy several days before the speech in which LTP lieutenants sought to preview and downplay LTP's upcoming speech, which they implied was empty rhetoric aimed at satisfying LTP's aggrieved political base. END NOTE.)

ACCUSES U.S., WEST OF TURNING A BLIND EYE

[13](#). (SBU) LTP likened the West's "exploitation" of President

Sargsian's internal weaknesses to finding "treasure" with which to advance its interests in the South Caucasus. He said the West is seizing upon Sargsian's democratic flaws -- "absence of legitimacy, the degree to which he is corrupted, and the vulnerabilities that exist in his moral character" -- as well as Sargsian's need for internal legitimacy to pursue an "immoral" agenda. LTP accused the West of being ready to compromise, "for a very low price," its own values of democracy and human rights, which suggested "an element of conspiracy that is being hatched against Karabakh."

14. (SBU) The purported agenda includes a deepening of Armenia's cooperation with NATO; Armenia "turning its back on Russia" in order to exclude it from the Minsk Group framework on NK resolution; endorsing the creation of "the forgotten proposal of a commission of Armenian and Turkish historians which would raise doubts about the factual veracity of the genocide and torpedo the process of its international recognition;" to agree to hold trilateral Armenian-Turkish-Azerbaijani negotiations; and "literally putting Nagorno-Karabakh up for sale."

SARGSIAN DRIVING RUSSIA FROM REGION TO APPEASE U.S.

15. (SBU) Blasting Sargsian's "sharp turn toward the West" as a desperate attempt to "cling to power," LTP alleged the U.S. was using Sargsian's legitimacy deficit as leverage to wean Armenia of its traditional ties with Russia and drive Russia out of the South Caucasus. LTP declared in order to appease the West, Sargsian was abandoning 17 years of a carefully cultivated foreign policy that sought to balance Armenia's foreign relations between the United States and Russia.

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16. (SBU) LTP charged that "by turning his back on Russia," and "embracing the West, represented by the USA and its ally Turkey," Sargsian is "entrusting the unilateral solution to the most crucial problem of Armenia's foreign policy) Nagorno-Karabakh -- to them." LTP warned that the alleged attempt to replace Russia with Turkey in the Minsk Group would seriously jeopardize the negotiating framework that has existed for 16 years and would exclude Russia from any international peacekeeping force that may be placed in NK. LTP said such a scenario could entail serious and unpredictable geopolitical consequences for Armenia, including Armenia's and Azerbaijan's suspension from the CIS, removal of Russia's military base from Armenia, and the removal of Russia's border troops stationed in Armenia.

COMMENT

17. (C) Although we were forewarned about LTP's upcoming address, we had not expected the opposition leader to stoop so low. His deliberate distortion of the facts, and unhelpful scare-mongering on well-known, long-standing U.S. foreign policy goals, which he himself has espoused over the years, strikes us as a desperation move from an opposition figure who now fears growing irrelevance. Faced with declining popular support and the likelihood that he cannot continue to draw mass crowds to his rallies, LTP pulled out all the stops to draw a big crowd this one last time, and then spun a conspiracy theory to save face and camouflage his own strategic retreat from the political battlefield. The timing of this cynical ploy is doubly unfortunate because it undermines President Sargsian's room for maneuver on Turkey and NK just as EUR A/S Fried was here urging President Sargsian to take advantage of the current political moment to achieve long-sought breakthroughs on Turkey and NK relations -- breakthroughs which LTP's closest advisers concede privately would be in Armenia's national interests. The ultimate significance of this LTP's rhetorical broadside on GOAM decision-making, however, is likely to be modest.

